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Disaster Ministries in Action – Spotlight on Uplands Village Residents Rich and Holly Nelson



Rich and Rev. Dr. Holly Nelson, residents of Uplands Village since 2012, both volunteer their time in response to disaster through the United Church of Christ's National Disaster Ministries. Rich serves as Disaster Coordinator for the UCC's Southeast Conference, while Holly is a Board Certified Chaplain who serves as a Disaster Chaplain for the national church.

When a disaster strikes in the southeastern U.S., such as the destructive tornadoes that ripped through Alabama in 2011, Rich may begin to work with the local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD),

which includes representatives from the Red Cross, FEMA, state and local authorities, Church World Service and a host of other groups involved in providing disaster relief. Together they determine what organizations are already providing relief, what resources they bring, what is still needed to help those who have been affected, and how best to coordinate all of these resources. Rich will help identify UCC

resources which can be directed to support those falling through the cracks. Because most disasters of magnitude have long-ranging effects, Rich might continue to be involved in coordination and planning long after the disaster has occurred.

Holly's work generally begins later in the recovery process. At the request of the UCC National Disaster Ministries, and UCC Conference Minister or ministers in the disaster area, she may find herself deployed anywhere in the country to counsel and provide emotional and spiritual support to weary ministers on the front lines whose congregations or communities have been impacted. This may be achieved through retreats for an affected group of clergy, by providing one-on-one time, or in any other way in which support can be offered to provide clergy involved in disaster recovery the strength they need to continue in their own ministries of healing.

Both Rich and Holly bring extensive experience to this work. Holly served for twenty years as chaplain for Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, and as chaplain and director of Pastoral Care Services of a number of hospitals of the Methodist Hospital System in San Antonio for five years. She also served as Dean of Students at Eden Theological Seminary for six years.

With an MBA in finance and accounting, Rich honed his strong organizational skills while working as a financial consultant for Robert Half Management Resources. But it was through his volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity and the UCC, especially on builds in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, that he learned firsthand about the many agencies, resources and people it takes to help bring a devastated area back to life.

Contributed by Mary Schantz

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